THE 2010 EARTHQUAKE

On January 12, 2010, a magnitude 7 earthquake struck the island nation of Haiti in an event that can only be described as a catastrophe. In the weeks that followed, the relief effort required complicated logistics complicated by the destruction of communication, sanitation and transportation infrastructure. Moreover, leadership in the local government, the UN presence and the Catholic church had been strained significantly by the possibility of collaboration with institutions on the ground (Romero, 2010; Holguín-Veras et al., 2012). An aid networked the country, NGOs that partnered with local networks (known as Collaborative Aid Networks) were most able to distribute supplies effectively (2010). This development prefigured collaboration and tension between NGOs and civil society communities, the separation of which is the subject of my paper.

AFFEC TED POPULATION

Most of the vulnerability and thus the destruction from the earthquake was located in the nation’s capital of Port-au-Prince. As with many disasters, populations already experiencing dispossession or exploitation were particularly vulnerable, but overall, urban areas suffered more than rural areas (Schuller, 2016).

KEY ISSUES

Humanitarian Logistics, mutual aid, solidarity, resistance, neo-colonialism, imperialism, sanctions, political activism.

METODOLOGY

I conducted a literature review comprised of both humanistic organization-oriented and social science-oriented studies. In drawing from both NGOs and local analyses, I hope to locate practices that could foster a less constrictive approach to disaster response.

I also place Cuba’s disaster response system in conversation with these emergent practices of mutual aid. In many ways, what theorists learned in the aftermath of the Haiti disaster was already contained in a tried-and-true manner, by the Cuban government, which is highly successful at limiting damage and human casualties from disasters (Gladstone, 2008).

FINDINGS

The structure of Haiti’s weak government and the extended presence of NGOs on Hispaniola has led to many to refer to Haiti as a Republic of NGOs - a nation that has become too dependent on humanitarian aid to develop independently (Schuler, 2007). Despite this pattern, exercises of solidarity and capacity-building persist in Haiti.

ROOT CAUSES

Colonialism and the legacy of enslavement
Economic marginalization
Foreign occupation
Fragile government
Globalization and neoliberal powers, including loans and debts
Inequality

DYNAMIC PRESSURES

Poor building codes
Lack of land tenure
Fragile infrastructure
Acute poverty
Unemployment
Deforestation and land degradation
Social inequality

UNSAFE CONDITIONS

Precarious settlements (on slopes, etc.)
Informal settlements
Poor sanitation, hygiene and health
Food insecurity
Low food stocks
Food savings
Absence of social insurance

CRISIS

60-300k lives lost
Trauma, physical and mental injury
Infrastructural and building loss
Loss of government capacity
Loss of livelihoods
Displacement
Cholera

SOURCES OF RESILIENCE

Access to aid from government and humanitarian agencies
Psychosocial factors such as spirituality, solidarity, collectivism and human capabilities
Connection to social movements, mutual aid and other forms of resistance

The 2010 earthquake struck the island nation of Haiti in an event that can only be described as a catastrophe. In the weeks that followed, the relief effort required complicated logistics complicated by the destruction of communication, sanitation and transportation infrastructure. Moreover, leadership in the local government, the UN presence and the Catholic church had been strained significantly by the possibility of collaboration with institutions on the ground (Romero, 2010; Holguín-Veras et al., 2012). An aid networked the country, NGOs that partnered with local networks (known as Collaborative Aid Networks) were most able to distribute supplies effectively (2010). This development prefigured collaboration and tension between NGOs and civil society communities, the separation of which is the subject of my paper.

Most of the vulnerability and thus the destruction from the earthquake was located in the nation’s capital of Port-au-Prince. As with many disasters, populations already experiencing dispossession or exploitation were particularly vulnerable, but overall, urban areas suffered more than rural areas (Schuller, 2016).

The structure of Haiti’s weak government and the extended presence of NGOs on Hispaniola has led to many to refer to Haiti as a Republic of NGOs - a nation that has become too dependent on humanitarian aid to develop independently (Schuler, 2007). Despite this pattern, exercises of solidarity and capacity-building persist in Haiti.

The 2010 earthquake struck the island nation of Haiti in an event that can only be described as a catastrophe. In the weeks that followed, the relief effort required complicated logistics complicated by the destruction of communication, sanitation and transportation infrastructure. Moreover, leadership in the local government, the UN presence and the Catholic church had been strained significantly by the possibility of collaboration with institutions on the ground (Romero, 2010; Holguín-Veras et al., 2012). An aid networked the country, NGOs that partnered with local networks (known as Collaborative Aid Networks) were most able to distribute supplies effectively (2010). This development prefigured collaboration and tension between NGOs and civil society communities, the separation of which is the subject of my paper.

Most of the vulnerability and thus the destruction from the earthquake was located in the nation’s capital of Port-au-Prince. As with many disasters, populations already experiencing dispossession or exploitation were particularly vulnerable, but overall, urban areas suffered more than rural areas (Schuller, 2016).

The structure of Haiti’s weak government and the extended presence of NGOs on Hispaniola has led to many to refer to Haiti as a Republic of NGOs - a nation that has become too dependent on humanitarian aid to develop independently (Schuler, 2007). Despite this pattern, exercises of solidarity and capacity-building persist in Haiti.

The 2010 earthquake struck the island nation of Haiti in an event that can only be described as a catastrophe. In the weeks that followed, the relief effort required complicated logistics complicated by the destruction of communication, sanitation and transportation infrastructure. Moreover, leadership in the local government, the UN presence and the Catholic church had been strained significantly by the possibility of collaboration with institutions on the ground (Romero, 2010; Holguín-Veras et al., 2012). An aid networked the country, NGOs that partnered with local networks (known as Collaborative Aid Networks) were most able to distribute supplies effectively (2010). This development prefigured collaboration and tension between NGOs and civil society communities, the separation of which is the subject of my paper.

Most of the vulnerability and thus the destruction from the earthquake was located in the nation’s capital of Port-au-Prince. As with many disasters, populations already experiencing dispossession or exploitation were particularly vulnerable, but overall, urban areas suffered more than rural areas (Schuller, 2016).

The structure of Haiti’s weak government and the extended presence of NGOs on Hispaniola has led to many to refer to Haiti as a Republic of NGOs - a nation that has become too dependent on humanitarian aid to develop independently (Schuler, 2007). Despite this pattern, exercises of solidarity and capacity-building persist in Haiti.